Coaching During the Transitioning Fifties: When the Traditional Employment Contract has been Broken or Work as We have Known It Doesn’t Work Anymore

Janet B. Matts

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Coaching During the Transitioning Fifties: When the Traditional Employment Contract has been Broken or Work as We have Known It Doesn’t Work Anymore

JANET B. MATTS

In this article the author explores the role that can be played by coaches for those organizational leaders in their 50’s who are making career decisions, having walked away from positions they have been performing for decades. They are leaving industries or firms where they have enjoyed long tenure, often losing their employment before they were ready. Corporate America continues to be characterized by chronic organizational change, including reorganizations, downsizing, right-sizing, mergers and acquisitions, rising healthcare costs and other workplace changes. At the same time, professionals in their 50’s can find themselves confronted with optional or mandatory retirement, redefining themselves as a result, and creating a new path for the ‘next chapter’. Small business ownership is on the rise, and many who find themselves in this place are looking for careers that blend their skills and create different options and life style changes.

Those in their 50’s can find themselves in a transitional place that was not expected, often leaving at the peak of their career, having their retirement plans disrupted. In addition, from an adult development standpoint, we can often identify powerful shifts at both the physical and psychological domain at this time in the adult journey. These shifts can be intensely disorienting when we add in a surprise/jolt/crisis on the career front.

I’ve spent many years as a leader and an executive coach. I worked closely with fellow leaders inside a large global organization, coaching them at any number of critical junctures in their leadership journey. I’ve learned much in my work with others that informs my current observations and interests, but nothing is quite as profound as one’s own experience in a time of transition. And so it is that I’m combining my own experience as a 50-something leader who has recently transitioned out of a long-term role inside an organization with my many years of coaching and working with other leaders faced with this transition. My intent is to weave together a better understanding of this phase of life, this unique transition, and the broader context and meaning this has in our world today. I’ve spent the past several months interviewing many leaders who are in the midst of this transition. This article shares stories from my own experience in this transition.
time, as well as experiences of other amazing men and women in their 50's who are currently in various stages of this transformative journey.

Needing to continue to earn an income and not ready for a traditional retirement profile, fifty-somethings are defining a second career in this 'age of parentheses', i.e., knowing what employment and retirement looked like before and understanding how different it will look in the future. Recognizing the domain between these two places can define how we will get there. It is a changing pattern that will define future expectations and ‘second careers’ for many as we live longer and need greater financial security to do that. We must generate our own ‘meaning’ after key transitions have occurred, e.g., children going off to school, parents aging, careers ending, health issues…and create possibilities that are now becoming the norm.

The stories I offer demonstrate a variety of ways these transitions are happening and provide important considerations for those who are being coached during this critical time. Paying attention to the process of growth and development physically, mentally, and spiritually can enhance this critical place in our adult development and enable us to emerge re-energized and focused on “the next chapter”. This is a new space and these individuals are defining a new way of thinking about and preparing for what life will look in the second half of life. And for myself, I reflect on this transitional time as a coach in a new way. I walk through my personal experience with a deeper understanding of self and a broadening of my own language as a coach. I approach coaching in a much less tactical, but practical, way. It is much more complex as we thread together all the developmental aspects of what is going on at this critical juncture in our lives. As you reflect on the stories, it is important to focus on the importance of a developmental approach to coaching and the skills needed to be in this space. Don’t be fooled by tactics and busyness…it’s about reflection and understanding and taking the journey.

THE TRANSITION OF A LIFETIME

I’m in New York City presenting at the Conference Board for my company, speaking of values and leadership, coaching and executive development. I am called back to the office to what I assumed would be a “reorganization meeting”. I am in the middle of the conference, will return tomorrow to be part of a panel, but take the train back to a different sort of meeting. The leader of the division and an HR person ask me how the conference is going. I respond, “Great, I think that they are very interested in our work and there are some great exchanges. I am looking forward to being part of the larger panel discussion tomorrow.” In response, “Great, I hope that you are making some good connections.”
I had no idea how profound that comment would be. He continued, “But the real reason to call you into this meeting is to let you know that your services are no longer needed.” “Excuse me,” I say, “Could I get a little explanation here?” “No time for that, you can go with the HR person and she will help you with the paperwork!” So, after twenty-one years in a Fortune 100 company, a great career and significant contributions, a legacy of leadership development and most recently, executive coaching, my services were no longer needed. Ouch!

So, here I am in the transition of a lifetime, knowing all about the “change cycle”, sense of loss and what to expect, how I will be feeling...all the things I coach others about, only it is a little different now, being on the other side. I feel lost, angry, devalued, and pushed aside. Intellectually, I know the models and the theories, I am aware of the actual work of transitions in my coaching work, and so I assume knowledge of what to expect. I will make a smooth transition as a result and will model that behavior as a good coach. But I learn quickly that my “loss of identity” with a company that I spent almost half of my life with, have loved and made numerous significant contributions to, is profound and needs to shift. I am creating a ‘different rhythm’ for myself and my life, and must ‘go through’ the journey, not around it, to fully appreciate the transformation.

Initially, I stay busy for that is what I know and am used to, 60 hour work weeks, and lots of e-mail, travel and activities. I join the local health club, as I have lost the privileges of the company gym, lose a few pounds, get back into swimming and Yoga, biking and a daily exercise routine. I cook more, eat healthy, try new recipes, take some writing courses, and experiment with my ‘singing voice.’ My financial planner and accountant get a lot of calls and we create a plan, a budget and the beginning of my own business. In the meantime, I interview for positions that I don’t get too excited about...the prospect of another “corporate job” doesn’t feel right at this time...or perhaps I need a new rhythm? I do pro-bono work, some consulting and pick up a few coaching clients.

It’s a new rhythm, one I am not used to, and I still question, “Am I busy enough?” Ahh, there is that ‘enough’ question again. What defines success? And how is that success defined? New answers to old questions are needed. I hire a coach to keep me focused and motivated during this transition time. I feel a newly found freedom that I haven’t felt before, and a sense of loss that is hard to explain to others who haven’t gone through this.

My experience, as I have learned, is not uncommon. The details and the company may be different, but the story is similar. This became apparent to me and allowed me to take a closer look at how we, as coaches, support others during this very turbulent
time. So, in addition to my own journey, I interviewed others about their transitions. I discovered what it is that they have done, what they are doing, and what makes for success in their lifestyle changes, their new space. Is there also a ‘spiritual journey’ that is part of the process as well, a reflection on the ‘larger purpose’ and ‘meaning making’ as part of that reflection? There will be more and more of this, and I believe if we pay attention to the journey and learn from the experiences, perhaps this is the “best education of the second half of life.”

As I reflect on my own story, there is a continued realization of this crisis opening a door to a new layer of development for myself, a new identity worthy of a deeper exploration. I find myself going back to Hudson’s four phase continuous change model, The Cycle of Renewal (Hudson & McLean, 1996, p. 54; Hudson, 1999, p. 57), moving from the ‘Go For it’ stage (previous corporate role), to the ‘Doldrums’ stage (job loss, loss of identity), to the ‘Cocooning’ stage (deeper search within), resulting in the ‘Getting Ready’ stage (trying new things, getting ready for greater

**Figure 1. The Cycle of Renewal**
emergence and preparation for what’s next) (see Figure One).

Voila, this transition catapults one into the lower half of the model, the deeper change territory.

In the past, we had a mostly predictable and linear path from work to retirement. If we were lucky, we arrived with a pension and social security to finance our later years, and time to relax and do things like take trips, play golf, garden, or volunteer. Well, that security is gone, retirement packages are disappearing, and all of this is happening at an earlier stage. At a time when today’s 50-plus person is redefining old concepts of retirement—for there is too much to be done in our world—creating meaning in our work still remains a key part of our life. Perhaps this new trend provides a space that ultimately opens up an opportunity to create a different path to our intended contributions— to create more lasting value in the world.

As I always tell my clients, when we go through a transition, we have to “go through” the process, not around it. This is where the above mentioned “Cycle of Renewal” can be helpful. It’s in the “letting go” of the old that we “let in the new,” and with this loss of long-time career comes loss of an identity. Like losing someone we love, we have a grieving period that can support the development of a new identity, a sense of new possibilities.

In her book, Leap! What Will We Do With the Rest of Our Lives?, Davidson (2007) describes the time in our lives called “the narrows”. This is a transitional time to a different phase of life, one that restricts and limits the possibilities of what has been and creates a reduced sense of opportunity to what we knew before. For example, children leave the nest and we experience a new relationship with our mate, our relationships change with our changing selves, our parents age and need added support from us, etc. Organizations let people go before they can receive retirement privileges. No longer do we look in the mirror and see the same person, and it takes a bit longer to present ourselves to the world. Our energy is changing. Davidson (2007, p. 30) suggests that “if you don’t do this voluntarily, the world or your body will force you to.” It is this time that starts in the 50’s, a time where we need to “let go of the past”. We must look to the person we are that is deeper and greater. So often life’s changes affect us, health issues show up, and we find ourselves dealing differently than we have had to do previously. In her book, Sara Davidson shares interviews she has held with many people across all walks of life, famous and infamous, about this transitional time. She notes that there is no single path that everyone will take. This generation will look for possibilities and change the path of the future for this generation.

In her book, The Wisdom of Menopause, Christiane Northrup (2006, p. 7) describes this stage of life for women as “the time
we transform and improve our lives, and ultimately our culture, though understanding, applying, and living in the wisdom of menopause.” She suggests that the changes women are experiencing can be just as significant as the changes of adolescence. To understand these ‘rites of passage’, we find ourselves changing in ways that are not always easy.

In her book, *Understanding Men’s Passages, Discovering the New Map of Men’s Lives*, Gail Sheehy (1998, p. 302) describes a passage when nothing works, you feel off-balance and not safe. Some of the things that seemed most meaningful in life no longer seem important. Defenses that worked for you in the past are no longer as effective. You feel time pressure. There is an urgent sense of needing to make things happen, to prove to yourself to change what’s not working. You find yourself asking ‘Who am I? What do I really stand for? What do I want out of life at this point?’ The way you feel about important people in your life changes. You know you’re coming out of a passage when the feeling of ‘aliveness’ returns.

So I share with you thoughts from the interviews I conducted, with the unique stories, the transition strategies used, and most importantly the success shared…not always easy but deep, rich, and insightful. Here is a summation of findings useful for coaching people in this transitional place.

**THE INTERVIEWS**

In my conversations about those in their 50’s transition, I came across some common threads that found their way into the conversations and the stories. The names have been changed and the stories altered to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each person I interviewed had important lessons and experiences worth sharing. Their stories allow others to recognize the significance of this time, and to acknowledge that it is not unique to feel these things.

**Susan**

Susan, a licensed Ph.D. psychologist, worked for a small consulting firm for 16 years. She talked about the change in generations in workplace values during her tenure there. Initially, she felt that “If I worked hard, am responsible, the company would take care of me.” Her thoughts changed when she saw the generations after her become partners sooner than her generation, as the rules changed. She and her fifty-something colleagues had the opportunity to work part-time for the firm when their children were growing up. Now as full-time consultants for the firm, they found themselves passed over for partner in the firm. A much younger, full-time candidate with far less experience gained the partnership role ahead of Susan and her colleagues. One of her learnings was the realization she had given
her organization far too much power over the direction of her own career. Her decision to take the risk of leaving and venturing out on her own was not an easy one, given her long-term work history and the earlier promise of becoming a partner with the firm. She saw that promise broken and the partnership positions given to younger employees. She felt she had little room for advancement and decided to take the leap into creating her own business and being successful on her own terms. Today, with a start-up business of her own, she has more business than she can handle and she has made a fundamental shift in the way she views herself and her career. She feels like she is making decisions based on her own sense of purpose at this stage in her life. She understands the “connectedness of her inner state to her outer state” that creates a different sense of what constitutes success for her in her work and in her life.

**Betsy**

This very successful HR executive had twenty years in Corporate America, creating stories in various industries about her search to use her potential to its greatest capacity. She learned that there is often a discrepancy between what is promised and what is actually delivered. She had many breakthroughs and a greater understanding of her ‘epiphany’ in her early 50’s with a clear direction of ‘what she was meant to do.’ Betsy believes that the transition is still occurring. With two daughters in their 20’s and an older husband, she speaks of the inter-generational differences in thinking and doing and would like to combine that knowledge and experiences in her “next chapter” which she is well on her way to writing.

**Dan**

This successful executive in senior management at a Fortune 500 company was let go by his company after 16 years as a result of his company being acquired. Although Dan has been through this acquisition process before, this time the ‘cultural fit’ seemed very disparate. He negotiated a package with the comment, “Enough is enough.” Dan had access to outplacement services which helped him create networking opportunities and then started to consult three days a week as he looked at other options. More and more as he interviewed, he realized that his heart was not into another ‘corporate lifestyle role’, and he continues to look at possibilities. There are offers on the table which will present ‘more of the same,’ another corporate role similar to the one he left with a long commute. Working with a smaller firm or consulting were other options for Dan at the time of the interview. “It’s all about possibilities and making the ‘right choice’,” Dan stated.

His two children are still in college, so it is important that Dan continue his earning power. His learnings to this point reflect “understanding the networking concept, understanding what that
really means, how it continues to support you, and how you help others in the process.” He stated that

Now I have a ‘career management and transition committee’ which keeps me focused and reminds me of the continued networking. Capitalizing on the opportunity to do things that I never had time to do, learning golf, riding my bike, continuing my running which I have always done…and focusing on some of the community service work that I wanted to do as well, keeps me busy. I am also contemplating a Yoga course which I think would be good for me to quiet my mind.

Amy

This senior executive at a Fortune 100 firm was coming back from a medical leave that was a result of burnout, a difficult boss and disillusionment. Amy spoke of her awareness of the criticality of taking care of her health and well-being. She opted to come back part time, leaving the fast-track for a healthier, more balanced lifestyle. She spoke of her work with a transitions coach who helped her “get her life back,” and readjust expectations of her contributions in the organization. She lost 30 pounds and had needed surgery. Amy changed her lifestyle habits as a result of her awareness and realization of her need to pay attention to the life transitions that were surrounding her. Her husband is thrilled to see her healthier, happier, and home for dinner!

Until she stopped and took the time to evaluate, Amy had no idea of how unbalanced she had become. She spoke of learning more about the midlife transformation she was experiencing. Amy confirms Christiane Northrup’s belief that at this time, more psychic energy becomes available to us than at any time since adolescence. If we strive to work in active partnership with that organic energy, trusting it to uncover the unconscious and self-destructive beliefs about ourselves that have held us back from what we could become, then we will find that we have access to everything we need to reinvent ourselves as healthier, more resilient women, ready to move joyfully into the second half of our lives (Northrup, 2006).

Many people are fed up with the greed and workaholic lifestyles that support today’s success models. They see the personal stress and organizational dysfunction that has come with the celebrity culture. They’re looking for something more lasting that will help them sustain multiple goals in their lives and in their work.

Julie

Julie’s story is probably one of the more difficult ones. She lives in Detroit, an area of high unemployment. The housing market has deteriorated because of massive unemployment. Julie was let go
by the auto industry with many others after 30 years, including her husband, without a pension (missing by five years, according to the formula). Everyone and his brother was hanging up a ‘consulting shingle’.

Julie talked about what has made her transition successful. “Creating choices is key…and to do that before you need to.” Julie started to acquire her teaching credential while still at her past job and had at least another option to explore when she was let go. She states, “I might have made different choices if I knew that this financial element would hit so hard, but at least I have something else I can explore.” Julie also spoke of home ownership in a depressed area, where the ‘golden handcuffs’ are the depressed real estate market: one’s home is worth significantly less than one’s mortgage. Moving to another area is not an option for the loss is too great. This story is a good reminder of the larger context as well – Julie lives in a part of the country and works in an industry that’s ‘in the doldrums’ in just about every way. This bleeds into the experience on an individual level as well.

Julie talked about “recreating herself” and spoke of two kinds of people in the organization. She noticed and acknowledged “those that could change quickly, assess their skills and find a niche to turn the skills that they have into recreated opportunities…versus those that felt angry, entitled or hung onto disappointment.” She spoke of surrounding yourself with optimistic people in your journey and ‘letting go’ of those who pull you down or feel sorry for you in your situation. She likened the process to the cancer survivor research about “thrivership” and spoke about the qualities of Lance Armstrong and his ability to beat his disease. The same process applies to a messy divorce. The research in this area demonstrates that same resiliency. She coined the term “your whining story” versus “your story over a glass of wine.”

Julie was smart enough to have a foothold in more that one area of life and that’s helped her gain some leverage in this tough time. Her idea of success was built within a ‘success framework,’ that allowed her to continue to succeed in a world subsumed by society’s stilted notions of success (Nash and Stevenson, 2004).

Joe
Because he had some notice regarding his impending departure from a significant position in the financial industry, Joe was able to build his skills while still in the organization. Joe left with a retirement package including a pension and severance so he could be planful about his future steps. He now had the financial means to take some time to plan what would be next. He felt strongly about negotiating before leaving and allowing a lawyer to help him. This negotiation process was key to providing

According to Rachel, “the 50’s are like being 22 with wisdom.”
the “artful ability to fight for what is yours, and know that you have done your best.” This is a great opportunity to allow you to ‘move on.’ He also found himself needing to take a closer look at his financial situation which he had neglected. His transition was more planful than most, including taking advantage of outplacement services and financial advice. Joe also created what he called an ‘advisory board’. He found that networking was the key. He looked to prospective clients through people that he had hired, mentored, and groomed in his career. He is now doing consultative work in his chosen field, and doing it differently. In Joe’s case, he had the opportunity to prepare, a chance to grieve before the event and prepare a bit psychologically to ease the shock. Perhaps we all need to prepare for these “endings, and new beginnings” (Bridges, 1980).

Rachel
According to Rachel, “the 50’s are like being 22 with wisdom... This transition, although difficult, has given me a whole new way of seeing the world, physically, financially and spiritually.” Rachel too looked at her life when she left a Fortune 500 financial firm as a key executive. Her children were going off to school, her marriage was on the rocks, her weight had crept up and she was not feeling good about herself. Through her transition, working with a coach, she created her mantra, “Purpose, Courage and Harmony”, which allowed her to lose 70 pounds and deal with the anger and responsibilities that now needed to shift in her family and relationship with her husband. She stated that the lessons around this difficult time were about “creating choice, owning the fact that you own that choice, shifting from passivity to activity, and owning your own decisions... Dealing with anger can get you unstuck. By nurturing and nourishing oneself, you can come through this difficult time.”

Rachel now writes for an on-line publication about transitions and is exploring more options for herself that enable her to share her personal learnings. She is preparing to complete her first triathlon as her exercise achievements after her significant weight loss has given her great confidence.

Michael
Michael’s thirty years in a Fortune 500 organization – including several years of reporting directly to the CEO – took a dramatic turn when the company was acquired. He no longer felt that his advice and knowledge were valued or appreciated, and he began to feel like he was being ignored. Michael talked about his transition as divided into three areas of focus. The first focus was on the emotional and psychological shock and loss of identity that wasn’t anticipated. He states,

“The way I was let go was a shock! My self-respect was depleted and the rhythm of my life changed. I was surprised how difficult it was to ‘get things done’, and how

It seems that networking is easier for those later in their careers, for they have the contacts and ability to connect through others because of relationships that have been built over the years.
often individuals I called didn’t return calls once I left. If they did, it was over a week later. I wasn’t accustomed to that and I took the infrastructure and the ‘team spirit’ for granted. The need to keep my self-respect allowed me to also do pro-bono work which gave me a sense of purpose and meaning during this transition.

The second focus was on pragmatic cash flow concerns. “It had a big effect on my spouse and family members. Looking at money in a different way and not being able to rely on an ongoing paycheck, takes some adjustment... Being planful and communicative about financial concerns is important,” he stated, “especially with your family and others. Also, working with a financial planner, if not already a part of your team should be a priority as well. This will give you ‘peace of mind’ and an understanding of the ‘bigger picture’ of your assets.”

The third focus for Michael was the ability to adapt to the changes you are experiencing, remain positive and stay engaged. Working out physically and keeping busy by networking and providing value was important to begin right away. At first it felt like I was adrift in a big ocean. I worked hard in my former company, people came to me, I really didn’t need to initiate, and besides, I was too busy. I had to push myself to be the initiator, to network, but have learned to enjoy the possibilities and part of a process which will now always be part of my life. I would offer advice for all those in organizations to keep those networks alive.

It seems that networking is easier for those later in their careers, for they have the contacts and ability to connect through others because of relationships that have been built over the years. Michael’s advice: “Create a portfolio of activities, discipline yourself, and then discipline yourself even more...Have patience and realize that it takes time.”

Here are the lessons learned by Michael: “Be proactive and plan your transition, allowing for your ‘board of advisors’ to be in place before you need them. Understand the changes within and around you, accepting the sobering ‘assembly line of life,’ as we age. Deal with the conscious and unconscious thoughts in organizations and the sobering reality that especially in this culture age is not always viewed as an asset.”

Barbara
A researcher and chemist, Barbara left a Fortune 500 company without negotiating an incentive package. She felt she’d spent too many years ‘on the treadmill of life’ and wanted to devote more time to her husband and an aging mom. Furthermore, Barbara could no longer get excited about ‘increased market share,’ and she asked herself, “Is this all there is?” She felt she wanted to do
something that provided more meaning and impact in the world. To accomplish this, she spent time defining what she would need to earn in an independent role, researching medical insurance costs, and becoming more aware of the benefits of that lifestyle. With the support of her husband, also an entrepreneur, and others in her network, she recently made the leap. She is doing quite well in her consulting business and “has her life back”.

Barbara also found that she had a lot of self-imposed commitments and took time with an executive coach to explore her ‘giving nature’ to others without giving to herself. Her blood pressure returned to a normal level without medication shortly after she left. Barbara now enjoys eating more meals at home with her husband, visiting her family on the West Coast, and enjoying life. Taking time to go back to school and pursue other interests in the medical field, she is looking to identify ‘giving back’ opportunities as well as diversifying her clientele to provide a steady income stream. Her success is built on relationships she established while in her previous roles. When asked about the possible creation of a website, Barbara stated, “I have enough work right now, and don’t want to be overloaded with too much. I don’t need to advertise at this time.”

One of Barbara’s greatest learnings is this:
As a consultant, I have to be a better advocate for myself. When I was in the organization, it was all about my people. I have to suppress my passion and assertion that I exhibited in the organizations that I worked in and provide a ‘coaching focus’ based on that experience. I am in a different space in this role. In addition, one of the greatest lessons was the ‘automatic-pilot’ I was on for years. My question has been: would I lose my edge if I had to go back into a full-time role again? I am often more tired after a shortened day than I was previously working 10-12 hour days. I realize that has to do with different energy expended and a different rhythm. I recognize that new rhythm.

Ahhh, the “rhythm of life”. Do we take time to adjust it in our lifetime? Through so many stories, these adjustments are happening—blending passion with meaning, experiencing success through ‘giving back’, appreciating our changing selves as we care for ourselves differently. Through these stories of transition, we hear some common threads about dealing with lifestyle changes, emotional and psychological impacts, health and vitality foci, and networks. What do we need to take away as coaches who are working with this population?

**COACHING POINTS**
As a coach to people in this significant life stage, it is important to recognize the focus and discipline that are needed to create a
successful transition. There are some learning points, both tactical and developmental, to consider, depending on the situation and the planning that has or has not occurred before the shift. If one is lucky enough to have some time to plan, it can be a little easier; however, if not, there are practical necessities that underscore any transition and a developmental process to which one needs to pay attention.

Prior to leaving
The initial tactical actions include:

• Know your rights and negotiate. Hire a lawyer. It is like a real estate agent who sells your house and is able to see things objectively, without the emotional attachments you have to your home. A lawyer knows employment law, is able to see things clearly, and knows what is reasonable and what rights you have. Have a lawyer review all legal documents.

• Understand your finances; don’t wait until the last minute to ‘figure it out’. Too many people get caught off guard because they are unaware and then become overwhelmed with the process. People seldom make the best decisions under emotional stress.

• Create your networks…while you are working, and afterwards. Too often we are so busy with our daily routine that we are unaware of the importance of our networks in our ‘next chapter’.

• Create a plan, hire a coach to keep you on plan, and allow time to nurture yourself during this transition and experience the loss. Too often, we think that we can “bounce back” immediately. This time and space provides an important cocoon for ‘figuring out’ what’s next…practically and realistically.

During the transitional time
The tactical actions to be taken during the transitional phase include these:

• Take care of the practical, health insurance, budget, and support. Create your own “board of support” during this time and talk to others around you that have experienced this same process.

• Recognize your identity is changing…Shed the old, create the new.

• Hang out with positive and nurturing people, let go of relationships that make you feel “less than”.

• Create choices and own those choices!

• Think about possibilities and continue to experiment with new ways of being.

• Nourish the body, take care of health issues.

• Exercise regularly eat right, and sleep well.

• Pay attention to what excites and feels ‘right’ to you.

• Create energy and have fun!
• Buy a pet, especially a dog, for unconditional love during this transitional time!!
• Network, network, network.
• Try new things, experiment and have a child’s mind again! Stay optimistic!

Table 1. Aspects of Both Practical and Developmental Aspects Need Attention for a Healthy Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological/Emotional</th>
<th>Physical/Health</th>
<th>Pragmatic/Practical</th>
<th>Networks/Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Identity Recognition</td>
<td>Health Issues Check Ups, etc.</td>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>Family Supports and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create new avenues and interests</td>
<td>Fitness - Exercise</td>
<td>Financial – Cash Flow investments</td>
<td>“Let go” of negative relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a routine and schedule</td>
<td>Create energy through things you enjoy doing</td>
<td>Create a budget and identify needed short and long term finances</td>
<td>Create new networks previous contacts, new networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ‘life style’ changes</td>
<td>Eat Healthy</td>
<td>Check Tax Implications</td>
<td>Connect with people in similar situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about Possibilities</td>
<td>Get enough Sleep</td>
<td>Stay optimistic and avoid Pessimism!</td>
<td>Create a ‘Board of Support’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t forget to Have fun!</td>
<td>Meditate Stress Reduction</td>
<td>Repackage skills and abilities</td>
<td>Attend networking events and new activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be gentle with Yourself</td>
<td>Nourish the body, mind and spirit</td>
<td>Be realistic and and don’t panic about money</td>
<td>Reach out to people that surround you on a daily basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy a pet if you don’t have one, it is unconditional love!</td>
<td>Create time “to be” rather than “to do”</td>
<td>Create an income flow as you define what’s next?</td>
<td>Use the internet and other tools to create ongoing connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Those who are most likely to cope well with whatever transitions they encounter have strong identity capital and adaptability resources.

The “nuts and bolts” of the tactical phases of the transition are important. However, during this significant transformation and at this developmental stage in life, here are additional considerations. As a coach, it is important to recognize these ‘themes’ and be able to share this important journey. It will take time and awareness.

• Resilience matters. Notice how resilient your client is, determine how your client has dealt with (or if they have dealt with) a major transition and life crisis in the past. This
can help you and your client determine the pace and ‘push’ for successful coaching during this phase.

- Work identity is a primary loss. This is a common thread for many and the ‘rhythm change’ from an ‘autopilot’ experience creates a period of grieving the old and finding the new. This can be different from one person to another and has a significant impact on a client and his or her family, friends and connections.
- Living from the ‘outside in’ vs. ‘inside out’ occurs in a major transition. This varies, based on the person’s orientation, optimism level, change adaptability, and how the transition occurred. Was it planned? How was it handled? Was it a surprise or did the person have time to prepare? Has the person being coached developed outside interests or alternative plans or has work been the primary focus?
- There is a new layer of development opportunity focused not only on the ‘doing’ but also on the ‘being’. With the depth of the transition and the developmental stage when it is occurring, this developmental opportunity can be the major educational link from the first to the second half of life.

**Post transition**

Because of the combination of both tactical and developmental aspects, this process continues into the ‘new phase’ and the reinforcement of the learnings and ‘next chapter’ activities will sustain the developmental process in a new space. Combined with the choices one makes, the relationships one builds, and the significance of the changes, this is a rich and rewarding time.

**CONCLUSIONS**

As we move from the first half of life to the second, we shift our focus and life style changes in this critical developmental stage. Harrington and Hall (2007, p. 180) suggest that success in one’s career is based on the ability to be open to new experiences and to be a continuous learner. An individual who is capable of perceiving options in a less-than-optimal situation will be able to successfully manage even an involuntary transition. Individuals who are able to develop a clear and realistic plan for change, those who have a positive outlook, and those who are resilient and future oriented are most likely to adapt well to the challenges the transition presents. Those who are most likely to cope well with whatever transitions they encounter have strong identity capital and adaptability resources. Kegan (1982) shows that each meaning-making stage is a new solution to the lifelong tension between the universal human yearning to be connected, attached, and included, on the one hand, and to be distinct, independent, and autonomous on the other. The Evolving Self is the story of our continued negotiation of this tension. In this significant transition, we see our identity at work and the connections and attachment it brings being challenged by independence during

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this significant time. Does this crisis time in our lives challenge us to move to a new level of development?

How does this transition play out with Erikson’s (Erikson & Erikson, 1998) stage of Generativity versus Self-absorption or Stagnation? This is a time where we tend to be occupied with creative and meaningful work and with issues surrounding our family. This is often when we can expect to ‘be in charge’. The task at this stage is to perpetuate culture and transmit values of the culture through the family and work to establish a stable environment. Strength comes through care of others and production of something that contributes to the betterment of society—which Erikson calls ‘generativity.’ When we’re at this stage we often fear inactivity and meaninglessness. As our children leave home, our parents age, our relationships or goals change, we face the mid-life crisis. We struggle with finding new meanings and purposes. Now with the additional of a work situation under transition, if we don’t get through this stage successfully, we can become self-absorbed and stagnate. Creating the significant relationships lost within the workplace, and injecting those into the community and the family becomes a powerful coaching conversation for clients.

This is an exciting opportunity in our lives and can provide the foundation for the “second half of our lives” in a thoughtful and balanced way. Enjoy the ride and the experiences; you will find things out about yourself that you never imagined!

This truly reflects a “midlife crisis” time for men and women, one that is gaining in frequency and is opening the door to a new identity when there is still plenty of time and energy to ‘live into’ a new way of being. This can be a real silver lining, an opportunity we aren’t able to exercise in the same way when we are 65 plus. Perhaps we are being given a new developmental gift.

As a result of this experience, ‘living this transition’, might I be better capable of coaching others in that space as well? As this transition has taught me, I hope that both the tactical and developmental pieces are important. What has shifted for me is my understanding of ‘holding the space’ to do this important transitional work as a coach and as a coach to open the door for clients to new possibilities. I think this type of coaching requires a coach with experience—the experience of really understanding the loss process, the deeper work that loss creates within ourselves and our core. It is a coaching process of a larger conversation that goes past the tactical. It goes deeper to the core of experiencing the loss, of grieving and coming out on the other side, and creating the new path forward.

In his book, Boom!, Tom Brokaw (2007) describes the disappointment of Boomers who have had the dream to “change

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Janet Matts is a strategic business consultant, leadership development professional, and executive coach. She brings her deep expertise and a track record of success with individuals, leaders, and organizations, in a unique mix of creating tools, processes, and systems ensuring measurable success. Janet’s twenty-one years at Johnson and Johnson in developing global leadership talent, experiences in the Peace Corps and EarthWatch in India and Africa, and a successful consulting and coaching practice, provide tremendous passion for creating sustainable change through transitions for individuals and organizations. Of particular interest is the growing number of individuals in their 40’s and 50’s going through significant transition and organizations re-inventing themselves to meet the current challenges.
the world,” but weren’t really able to do that. Perhaps this is the real time in the lives of the Boomers to make that sustainable difference. And just perhaps, like everything else the Boomers have changed, a new phase of ‘the next life chapter’ is being defined. I applaud the many Boomers who face this time with optimism, hope and excitement. They can create the tools and retrieve the ‘wisdom’ they have garnered during their lifetimes and use these tools and this wisdom to create a better world for future generations.

REFERENCES


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